

Symptoms

The infection can assume one of three forms.

- Most often, it strikes the spaces between the toes, causing itching, scaling, and often, cracking of the skin.
- A second form, which tends to be chronic, causes the skin on the soles and sides of the feet to become itchy, scaly and thickened.
- The third and most distressing type involves itchy fluid-filled blisters, mainly on the instep, heel, and ball of the foot.

To start growing, the athlete's foot fungi needs warmth and humidity. In most people, fungal infections flourish in the summer because the feet sweat more. Even during cold weather however, undue exposure to heat may produce an outbreak.

Prevention and Treatment

Although antifungal medication can suppress the infectious fungi and distressing symptoms for weeks, months, or even years, medications do not cure athlete's foot. The warm, moist conditions that allowed the fungi to grow in the first place are likely to recur. It is important to remember, therefore, that once someone has had athlete's foot infection, he remains a "carrier" insofar as his own skin is concerned. This is true even though the skin may look normal.

To prevent relapse, special care should be taken to promote dryness at all times. The following preventative measures will help:

- Keep feet clean and dry.
- Wash and dry carefully between the toes. Moisture between the toes contributes to infection.
- Use absorbent foot powder to reduce excess moisture.

Treatment (cont.)

- Change shoes and socks daily. Wear sandals as often as possible to allow feet to breathe.
- Wear cotton, wool, or cool max socks to absorb moisture. Some synthetic socks cause sweating.
- Do not scratch the area. Scratching can spread the infection to the soles of the feet and to the fingernails.
- Do not exchange shoes and socks with other people.
- Clean the shower and bathtub carefully after each use to prevent the spread of infection to others.
- Antifungal medication usually eliminates the symptoms when the instructions are carefully followed. But, continued foot care is essential to prevent the symptoms from returning.

When to See Your Family Doctor

- If symptoms are severe (pain, oozing, blisters, or odor).
- If the problem persists after 3-4 weeks of self-treatment.
- If the soles and sides of the feet are chronically itchy, scaly, and thickened.